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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

During the three years following the last war more people died of famine and disease than were killed in battle in the four years of the war itself. Appalling conditions prevailed in Western Russia, Poland, the Balkans, Austria and Germany, but our people and government remained largely ignorant and indifferent. The *Lancet* reported that when Mr. Austen Chamberlain was asked in 1922 to increase the Parliamentary vote of £100,000 for gifts for relief work in Russia, he replied that "it is not our bounden duty to become a kind of Mrs. Jellaby among nations."

THE CHANGED OUTLOOK

In marked contrast to this indifference is the present attitude both of public opinion and of government policy to post-war relief. In August, 1940, Mr. Churchill made a statement on government policy in the House of Commons. He said: "We shall do our best to encourage the building up of reserves of food all over the world, so that there will always be held up before the eyes of the peoples of Europe, including—I say it deliberately—the German and Austrian people, the certainty that the shattering of Nazi power will bring to them all immediate food, freedom and peace." [1] This was followed in September, 1941, by Mr. Eden's enunciation of government policy as "social security abroad no less than at home."

We are committed to succour Europe. Human issues have taken precedence. This change of attitude is something for which to be thankful. We must at the same time make up our minds not to allow the strong tides of war weariness and lethargy and self-seeking which set in after the last war to engulf these high hopes.

THE POST-WAR TASK

The task is almost stupefying in its immensity.

Firstly, malnutrition will prevail over a large part of Europe, varying in intensity from undernourishment to acute famine. As we have indicated in previous News-Letters in accounts of conditions in Belgium, Greece and France, an increasing number of people, amounting to millions, are suffering from malnutrition so severe as to call for medical treatment as well as for food. The longer the war lasts, the greater will be the danger of real famine.

Secondly, on the heels of malnutrition will come disease. Tuberculosis and rickets are already increasing—in some places rapidly. Typhus, of which there was remarkably less than was expected in the first two years of the war, broke out in some of the Balkan countries last winter, and is severe in Spain. In Morocco and other parts of North Africa there were thousands of cases per week for many months last year. Malaria is considered by some medical authorities to be the most serious threat, for it attacks not only the patient, but the future generation. Malaria was wide-spread over South-Eastern Europe

[1] Hansard, House of Commons, August 20, 1940.

after the last war, in some areas 90 per cent of the population being affected. Nearly the whole of the world's supply of quinine is now in the hands of Japan, and the dearth of this specific is already resulting in an increase of the disease. Malnutrition decreases resistance and powers of recovery. Other lesser diseases, such as measles and whooping cough, show a far higher mortality rate among undernourished subjects.

Third among our post-war problems will be material devastation. The destruction of houses and the consequent overcrowding increases disease. In Warsaw more than half the total number of houses has been destroyed, but the population of the city has increased by over half a million. Means of transport have been commandeered. Canals are left without barges, railways without rolling-stock, and roads without bridges. All this will hamper the bringing of speedy relief, both from the outside and from agricultural areas within the occupied countries, to the needier parts. But of all material devastation, that of farming lands which have become battle-fields is perhaps the most serious and the most difficult to remedy. Vast areas of Russia have become "scorched earth." In many other parts of Europe agriculture has declined from lack of feeding stuffs for animals, lack of transport to markets, lack of seeds and fertilisers, and commandeering of horses. The experience of the last war showed that it was isolated village communities and farmsteads, often cut off by snow from autumn to spring, in which famine was most severe and typhus epidemics most deadly. The rehabilitation of farming is a slow job. Centuries ago, as for example after the Thirty Years' War, agricultural land remained devastated for decades. After the last war its restoration took years. One of the most important factors in combating malnutrition and disease is the re-establishment of the milk supply. In Germany and Austria the practice of using flour and water to replace milk continued long after the war ended, because the 30 per cent fall in the milk supply over the whole of Germany made it totally unobtainable in many places. The restoration of agriculture constitutes one of our major and most enduring relief problems. For example, a peasant and his family attempting to plough their fields by hand cannot produce enough food to support even themselves. To do this they must have a horse or oxen at the plough.

Fourthly comes the problem of order, without which relief work cannot proceed. Unimaginable chaos may follow this war and aggravate every one of these previously named problems. There are estimated to be close on three and a half million foreign workers in Germany apart from one and a half to two million prisoners of war. Southern France has many thousands of refugees. Only thorough organization and strong control can prevent these from joining hundreds of thousands of war-weary soldiers in one mad scramble to get home—crowding transport, carrying disease, and finding all too often on arrival no home, no family and no work. The collapse of the highly centralized Nazi system of government will increase the need for military order.

Lastly come the moral problems. Prolonged undernourishment, a life of fear and often of horror, suspense and emotional strain produce a state of moral illness in individuals and in communities more difficult to diagnose and to cure than physical illness. Bitterness amounting to unbridled hatred, wolfish individualism, factiousness and an inability to co-operate with others will undoubtedly be common. Psychological disorders among adults and particularly among children who have seen murder and torture, pillage and rapine, are to be expected on a large scale.

IS THE TASK TOO GREAT ?

What chances are there that order and stability can be restored to such a continent as Europe may well be when this war is ended ? Dark as the future is, there are not wanting gleams of hope.

Voluntary organizations, supplemented by belated government action and working against great odds, saved the lives of nearly three million people, mostly children, in Russia alone after the last war. With an earlier start, better planning and larger help from

governments in supplies and personnel, they could have saved as many more. We have realized in time that help must be immediate and upon a vast scale. We see that it must not be left to each European Government to snatch what it can for its own people, but that inter-allied control must be exercised, with supreme power to purchase supplies at fixed prices, apportion them according to needs and to control the necessary transport.

In addition to experience gained after the last war, we have a greatly increased knowledge of such things as the relative nutritional values of various foods, the symptoms and cure of nutritional diseases. There are new drugs and more easily produced vaccines ; vitamins can be prepared. In addition to this, practically every country in Europe has its own health services, some of which had their origin in the relief work done after the last war. Although some may have been almost destroyed by the Nazi persecution of doctors and commandeering of buildings, others still remain, and, perhaps more important, the people themselves know how to make use of health services and appreciate their value. The Nazis have maintained their power largely by their command of such modern techniques as the press and the radio. These can be used for disseminating information and checking sudden movements of population.

RELIEF AS RECONSTRUCTION

The task of relief must be distinguished from another larger problem. In the various areas of Europe human life after the vast convulsions through which it has passed will be shaped into new patterns. This will be done in the main by the people themselves. Over the process the United Nations can exercise little direct control, though there will be points at which the power and resources in the hands of the victorious nations can be advantageously and decisively employed to create the conditions in which the task of reconstruction in the larger sense can be undertaken with the best chance of success. But whatever measures may be called for in the wider political field will be greatly assisted by the success which attends the programme of relief and the spirit in which it is carried out, as well as by the example set by this country in the handling of its own affairs. The interest shown by allied Governments in the Beveridge Report is evidence that other countries are looking to this country for a lead in reconstruction.

Our concern in this News-Letter, however, is with the responsibility of the United Nations for the immediate and immense task of post-war relief. This task is one which needs to be envisaged as a whole, even though the carrying of plans into effect may have to start with the areas that are first freed from German occupation. Nor must attention be concentrated, even at the beginning, solely on the immediate, speedy and efficient distribution of food and medicine. The first pint of soup is the first step towards reconstruction, for the way in which relief is administered and the persons to whom it is first given helps to form the pattern of the new European society.

This brings us to the question of priorities. If we are thinking solely in terms of immediate relief, then those categories of the population who are in most dire need of it —probably the children of two to five years of age—should receive it first. But if we are thinking of reconstruction, then the priority given to agricultural workers in war-time rationing schemes must not be set aside. Again, priorities in supplies are determined by whether we regard relief as mere first aid or as part of reconstruction. Fertilisers, on this view, may be more important than cocoa, raw materials than soap. Most important of all, our determination of the agencies which perform relief work and the type and training of the persons they employ depends on what we expect of them. If we foresee a short period of intense relief, then the suitable agency is either army personnel (of whom some are already being trained by the American Army), or civilian personnel chosen for technical efficiency and working under government or military control. These would be regarded by the population as the agent of a foreign power ; in all probability a time limit would have to be fixed for their withdrawal and there would be a sudden change-over.

There is everything to be said for the maximum use of voluntary agencies. Relief can be a creative part of reconstruction if it is in the hands of agencies which, while they are dependent on governments for supplies and subject to a co-ordination of their activities from above, are yet free to criticize their governments, to take initiatives to meet unforeseen circumstances, to apply their own methods and to enlist in their service men and women who, while technically efficient as doctors or nurses or accountants or store keepers, are seeing their job in a much larger setting. It is within the power of relief workers belonging to voluntary societies to foster local initiative, to coax into leadership those who from prolonged suffering would prefer to lie back and have things done for them, to persuade rival factions in a town to work together on relief committees, to foster the revival of those many free associations of persons whose destruction was one of the bitterest accompaniments of Nazi rule, and above all by treating individuals as persons and not as charity cases to restore to them their impaired sense of the worth of life and the reality of human brotherhood.

The Allied Post-War Requirements Bureau is already at work on a vast number of technical questions of supply, transport, finance, control and estimate of needs. Sixteen voluntary organizations, some of which have had experience of relief work, have recently joined together to form the Consultative Council of Voluntary Societies for the Relief of Suffering and for Aiding Social Recovery,[1] to formulate as far as possible a common policy and to maintain constant and easy contact with government agencies. Each has its own contribution to make and its affinities with fellow organizations on the Continent. More than a thousand young people, both in and out of the Forces, are already training in languages and the basic principles of relief work under several voluntary organizations, and their training is under discussion with the Post-War Requirements Bureau.

It would be a grave mistake, however, to regard the sending abroad of a few hundred relief workers as the only contribution which the Churches in this country have to make. The British Council of Churches is a constituent part of the World Council of Churches, and through these Councils every Church in this country is committed to fellowship with the Churches of the Continent. Steps which ought to be taken to re-establish the Churches on the Continent are already under consideration, and the part which this country might be called on to play in such matters as the re-opening of the many social and philanthropical institutions of the Churches on the Continent (a most important part of reconstruction) will become clearer as consultations proceed.

Over and above this the Churches of this country have an immense educative task to perform here. It is doubtful whether the average citizen has any conception of the sacrifice which he must make if we are to give Europe the help that is needed. Such restraints as a long prolongation of rationing, a postponement of demobilization and the restriction of private enterprise will be regarded as unnecessarily irksome unless they are seen as a positive contribution to rebuilding Europe and are cheerfully accepted by a large body of people. To this task of education we can give ourselves at once.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

[1] Chairman, Sir William Goode, K.B.E. Temporary address : 14 Grosvenor Crescent, S.W. 1.

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